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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000753

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNGA](#) [TU](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON FM NALBANDIAN

REF: A. YEREVAN 700
[1](#)B. YEREVAN 703

Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Yovanovitch's first call on the Foreign Minister highlighted Armenian enthusiasm to boost its U.S. relationship, as well as updates on the substance and tone of the Turkey and Nagorno Karabakh issues. The FM also conveyed a complaint that the newly-selected Yerevan bureau chief for the Radio Liberty service is an open supporter of the radical opposition. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) UNUSUALLY QUICK COURTESY: Newly arrived Ambassador Yovanovitch presented copies of her credentials to Foreign Minister Nalbandian September 19, with presentation of originals to President Sargsian scheduled for Monday, September 22. Both the FM and president had agreed to schedule the credential ceremonies promptly after the ambassador's September 17 arrival so that she could participate in Armenia's September 21 Independence Day celebrations and fully begin work even before the President and Foreign Minister return from the UN General Assembly in New York. Nalbandian was warmly welcoming, and the conversation lasted well over an hour.

[1](#)3. (C) CRAVING STRONGER U.S. PARTNERSHIP: Ambassador and Foreign Minister each expressed satisfaction that the ambassador's arrival -- after two years without an American Ambassador in Yerevan -- came at a pivotal time of great opportunities for the bilateral relationship and possible dramatic progress on long-standing regional stalemates with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Both affirmed their strong desires to deepen bilateral ties. The Ambassador thanked Nalbandian for the GOAM's clear statements in Washington that it was time to have an American Ambassador again. Nalbandian replied that he had done so for Armenia's sake, as the lack of a U.S. ambassador was "abnormal" and did not serve Armenia's interests and aspirations for broader U.S. engagement. Nalbandian remarked that from his first day in office he had felt that strengthening relations with the United States was his highest priority.

[1](#)4. (S) TURKISH RECONCILIATION: The Ambassador congratulated the minister on President Sargsian's courageous and visionary step in inviting Turkish President Abdullah Gul to Yerevan for the Turkey-Armenia World Cup qualifying match. Nalbandian expressed appreciation for U.S. efforts to facilitate Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. Nalbandian spoke at some length about the Gul visit, which he considered a great success. He noted that after the soccer game and Gul's departure, he and FM Babacan had returned to the MFA and spoken for two hours, late into the night, and found themselves in agreement on a way forward for normalizing the Turkish-Armenian relationship. Nalbandian expressed his conviction that President Gul, PM Erdogan, and FM Babacan are all three firmly committed to Armenian rapprochement. Nalbandian expressed high hopes that his planned September 26 meeting in New York with FM Babacan on the margins of UNGA would generate more progress with Turkey. Nalbandian called

for U.S. encouragement on the GOT to move ahead, and emphasized that the Armenian side is fully ready to press forward quickly. He commented that the proposal Armenia had already made to Turkey was the "maximum" Armenia could give.

15. (C) POLITICAL HURDLES ON TURKEY: Nalbandian noted that the GOAM faces some political dissent at home and abroad to its policy of Turkish reconciliation. He remarked on the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak) protest demonstration upon President Gul's airport arrival, which he said had enraged Deputy Under Secretary Cevikoz, though he said Gul himself had been unperturbed. More generally, Nalbandian asserted that the real opposition to rapprochement was from Armenians abroad. He asserted that 80 percent of Armenians here at home support Turkish reconciliation, but said that probably 80 percent of Armenian Diasporans living abroad had the opposite view, believing the "genocide" should be recognized first. Nalbandian noted that the Diaspora is not without influence in Armenia, contributing substantial funds and with influential political voices in many foreign capitals. Nalbandian said that President Sargsian and even he himself -- who had always had good relations with Diaspora Armenians -- had come in for harsh criticism from Armenians abroad. Nalbandian conceded that the GOT doubtless was under at least as much political pressure for its outreach to Armenia. The Ambassador praised the GOAM for exercising positive leadership in Armenia's national interests, even in the face of criticism.

16. (S) AZERBAIJAN AND NAGORNO KARABAKH: Nalbandian commented that Armenia and Azerbaijan are in some ways very close to agreement, which may be achievable following the Azerbaijani

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election. Nalbandian said he had told Azerbaijani FM Elmar Mammadyarov that the GOAJ must call a halt to its "militaristic propaganda" as this continued dangerously to incite Azerbaijani public opinion. Ambassador asked if the Russia-Georgia conflict has changed the tone or substance of the NK negotiations. Nalbandian replied it was "like a cold shower" for Azerbaijan, and especially for Azerbaijani visions of militarily retaking NK for itself. He noted that bellicose rhetoric from Baku had gone silent after the Russia-Georgia crisis. Nalbandian pointed out, however, that Azerbaijan is not yet willing to disavow publicly any first use of military force in connection with the NK conflict, reporting that the Finnish Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE had tried to win such a statement from Azerbaijan with no success.

17. (C) PLEA FOR HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS/VISITS: Nalbandian said he had invited Secretary Rice to visit Armenia during his Washington meeting with her last Spring. He hoped she would come, whether before or after January 20. He also looked forward to seeing her in New York on the margins of UNGA. Ambassador noted that a real breakthrough on NK would be the strongest incentive for her to visit, given the high priority she placed on getting to an agreement. Nalbandian reiterated Armenia's hope that Armenian officials would be offered meetings at the highest levels, with President Serzh Sargsian visiting New York for UNGA, and Prime Minister Tigran Sargsian (no relation) visiting Washington October 9-14 for both the World Bank/IMF meetings and bilateral business. The Economy Minister would then lead the GOAM delegation to Washington in November for the U.S.-Armenia Economic Task Force (USATF). All of these, and other opportunities, should be seized "and other opportunities created" for high-level meetings between U.S. and Armenian officials.

18. (C) RADIO LIBERTY COMPLAINT: Ambassador had a tete-a-tete session with Nalbandian for the purpose of discussing a sensitive issue reported septel. Nalbandian seized the chance to complain about Radio Liberty, which reportedly has just hired as its new Yerevan bureau chief a man whom Nalbandian referred to as a member of ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian's opposition movement. He said that

both he and President Sargsian were surprised and upset by the move, which looked like the U.S.-run media agency was determined to campaign against President Sargsian. (COMMENT: We have had complaints from the government about Radio Liberty before, and these have been renewed in recent weeks. We had also heard rumors that the newly-picked bureau chief -- who has not yet been officially named, so far as we know -- is a member of Ter-Petrossian's Armenian National Congress opposition movement. We are checking the veracity of this report. If true, we have grave reservations about RFE/RL's judgment in selecting such a divisive figure to head its local news bureau, and will be in touch with RFE/RL management in Prague to discuss the issue. END COMMENT) YOVANOVITCH